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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Discussion paper contributed by the youth and children major group**

Summary

The world's youth and children collectively constitute a valuable human capacity, able to learn, innovate and create dynamic responses to what seem to be formidable challenges to sustainable development. In the context of forests and within the United Nations Forum on Forests process, youth and children should continue to be recognized as stakeholders of our world and their contribution should be valued as such.

* E/CN.18/2003/1.
** Prepared by the Global Youth Network.

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Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–7	3
II.	Background and lessons learned	8–30	3
III.	Youth involvement in implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action	31–38	7
IV.	Economic aspects of forests	39–42	8
V.	Forest health and productivity	43–45	9
VI.	Maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs	46–48	10
VII.	Recommendations	49	10
VIII.	Conclusion	50–51	12

"Young people perhaps understand better than most that we are not living in a zero-sum, environment-versus-economy world." — Secretary-General Kofi Annan, World Youth Report 2003.

I. Introduction

1. This discussion paper serves to inform the United Nations Forum on Forests at its third session about the current status of youth involvement in the implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) proposals for action relating to youth and children, as well as about youth and children input into all aspects of forestry, including economic aspects, forest health and productivity, and in maintaining vital forest cover to meet present and future needs.

2. We welcome the opportunity given to young people to be given a voice in United Nations Forum on Forests through the multi-stakeholder dialogue, and we also call for the 3rd session of this Forum to endorse the recommendations contained in this paper.

3. We are aware of the need for youth action now to promote sustainable development and conservation and protection of forests for the benefit of future generations, backed by responsible and sustainable consumption of forest resources by nations, communities and individuals. We call for renewed action to implement the provisions of Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda and other international agreements to protect forests.

4. The purpose of the multi-stakeholder dialogue should be to evaluate the contribution and engagement of civil society in forest issues and, more importantly, to highlight obstacles and solutions to achieving sustainability in all forest-related sectors. This document is presented as a forward-looking document, evaluating achievements and elaborating the way forward in identifying obstacles and opportunities for increasing youth action on forests. It highlights youth as valuable and responsible partners in forestry.

5. The paper has been compiled with the assistance of a drafting commission of young people active in forestry issues from all regions, with special attention given to gender and cultural balance.

6. We are convinced of the importance of providing young people with the resources and enabling environment to tackle the personal and societal challenges that beset them.

7. We recognize that young people should take an active role in conceptualizing, decision-making, implementation and evaluation of forest policies, and organize themselves at various levels to create effective networks and develop skills to mobilize resources in order to implement IPF/IFF proposals for action.

II. Background and lessons learned

Background

8. Forests cover 30 per cent of the world's land cover and are responsible for providing the world's wood, fuel and other valuable non-wood forests products, as

well as maintain an important part of the world's biodiversity and rare ecology. Youth are part of the population that live in and use forests and thus are also a group affected by the unsustainable use of forests. It is, therefore, of vital importance that all programmes and institutions enhance youth participation in ensuring that the exploitation of forests is sustainable. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization's Global Forestry Resource Assessment 2000, 9.4 million ha of forest cover disappear annually. We must ensure that forests are used in a sustainable manner.

9. The forest sector exists within the context of the environment; but within forests there are livelihoods, diverse ecosystems, cultures and heritage and solutions to economic, social and environmental challenges facing the world today. Our forests clothe, feed, heal and sustain humanity; they are a vital and integral part of the world.

10. Youth and children are a historically marginalized demographic group with unique challenges as well as opportunities. In recent years the international environmental movement has become a platform for youth mobilization and action on environmental issues. Youth and children have recently offered their own input with regard to forests as a specific sector of the environment. It is hoped that youth and children will continue their increased involvement in environmental movements in order to contribute positively to protecting and nurturing the world's forests.

Lessons learned

11. Owing to a lack of funding interest in youth activities, youth initiatives seldom reach beyond the phase of discussion and yet young people are criticized by the people responsible for funding the initiatives for not bringing enough action to international processes. This paradox is disturbing! Youth need to be granted financial assistance in order to act!

12. A great obstacle to youth and children action to benefit forests is the obstacle experienced by youth and children NGOs in accessing the United Nations. Although UNEP and similar United Nations agencies host youth programmes, youth access to participate in and influence official United Nations processes is minimal, owing to lack of information and stringent and exclusive criteria for obtaining consultative status. There is, however, growing consensus that youth and children are important stakeholders in official United Nations processes, hence the inclusion of a multi-stakeholder process within the United Nations Forum on Forests.

13. Forest issues and their complexity often elude the uninformed young person concerned with the environment. It must be pointed out, though, that these young people still have the capacity and basic knowledge with which to contribute greatly to meeting the objectives of the Forum and implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action.

14. Following on this point, it must be recognized that youth have only recently been included in the multi-stakeholder process of the Forum. Within the IPF/IFF proposals for action, youth are not identified as stakeholders for implementation, although this demographic group has been accepted for inclusion in the non-governmental organizations category. It can be argued that the exclusion of youth as a major group within the IPF/IFF proposals for action marginalized youth input and action aimed at implementing the proposals. It is strongly encouraged that any

further documents include the youth and children demographic group as responsible partners in implementation.

15. We realize that much of the world population lives in poverty, facing daily the unacceptable conditions of hunger and malnutrition, disease, homelessness, unsafe environments and social exclusion, and that the majority of this population consists of young people, three quarters of them living in the surroundings of forests in rural areas.

16. An obstacle is the exclusion of young people in the process of official decision-making, forest policy-making and programmes aimed at sustainable forest exploitation.

International

17. Forest issues are relevant at all levels, local, national and regional, but it is at the international level that comprehensive discussion of the issues takes place. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, youth and children have been included into the United Nations Forum on Forests process recently but have no formal experience in advocating forest issues in relation to the United Nations at the international level.

18. Youth and children experience difficulty in accessing the United Nations owing to the stringent and exclusive criteria involved in obtaining consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. These criteria are seldom met by youth NGOs, even though many youth NGOs operating at all levels have the capacity to contribute positively to United Nations processes, for example: the Forum.

19. Globalization is an issue of both local and international concern; the economic activities that characterize globalization have negative social and economic impacts on local communities, the demographic groups hardest hit by these social and economic impacts are youth and children. Globalization must be harnessed as a positive force for the protection of our forests.

20. Destructive actions on the part of transnational/multinational corporations have been identified. These destructive actions include: unsustainable use of forest lands for economically driven activities, exploitation of forest environments with no effort to avert the negative effects, exploitation of forest inhabitants, deforestation of fragile forests for short-term economic ventures, and the relocation of native forest-dwelling people and the subsequent weakening of their cultural heritage. It is absolutely vital that multinational corporations carefully calculate the social and economic impacts on forest-dwelling persons and communities reliant on forests as a livelihood, as well as carefully consider the environmental impacts of their activities on forest ecology, health and productivity.

Regional

21. There is a lack of regional coordination on forest issues, which affects youth and children. This deficit has meant that young people cannot respond adequately to regional threats to forests, which often occur as a result of environmental problems, such as air pollution. Air pollution is recognized to have transboundary characteristics (i.e. it has the potential to affect an entire region) and is one example of the environmental problems facing youth and children today.

Certain regional economic and social issues impact forest health and productivity directly; these issues include chronic unemployment and poverty. These issues pose great challenges for young people entering informal or formal roles in forestry.

National

22. Government-granted logging concessions are, in some cases, granted without meaningful mechanisms for monitoring and assessing the impacts of the logging activities. Breather periods for forests to recover from logging activities need to be ensured as an important component of national legislation pertaining to forests.

23. Young people lack organization with regard to forest issues at the national level. This lack of organization contributes to a lack of awareness among youth and children about the importance of forests and their biodiversity.

24. As pointed out in the achievements section, few Member States have implemented action aimed at involving forest issues in national primary and secondary education curricular; this action would greatly enhance implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action.

25. Associated social and economic dimensions greatly impact forests; growing youth unemployment rates and the related social impacts often lead young people to act in unsustainable ways to meet their subsistence needs. Forests are exploited in unsustainable ways when the economic and social environment is weakened. In a global world it is vital to recognize the inextricable link between forests, the environment and economic and social conditions within Member States. Young people tend to be the most vulnerable and marginalized group with respect to unemployment, poverty, conflict and health problems.

26. In most countries, essential possessions and services are derived from forest resources that have assured the food security of peoples for the past hundred years. They are a source of financial resources, medicinal products and utilitarian materials. These constitute basic elements for all development.

Local

27. As already mentioned, young people at the local level, especially young people from forest-dwelling, forest-reliant communities are impacted greatly by wide-ranging international economic activity. For example, youth and children are impacted — often adversely — by relocation for the purpose of commercial activity.

28. Linked to the growing world human population is the need to provide infrastructure to support humanity; urban development has been recognized as, on the one hand, providing vital infrastructure to local communities, but, at the same time, threatening valuable forests and their biodiversity.

29. In order to empower young people in rural and urban areas to combat hunger and poverty especially among youth, they need to be provided with the necessary resources and capacities in order to create employment and earn an income for their own sustainable livelihoods. Priority should be given to rural youth greatly affected by hunger and poverty, through specific programmes and funding involving the provision of production resources, such as land, water and seeds, and of appropriate technologies and training in sustainable farming, life skills and forest resource management. The United Nations, United Nations bodies and agencies,

Governments and regional organizations should make decisive efforts to establish a fund for youth development, to be managed by youth and geared towards youth.

30. Forest-dwelling communities include youth and children. In situations of war or other unsustainable activities, for example overexploitation of forests or illegal logging, such vulnerable groups suffer first. Youth and children in forest-dwelling areas are required to sustain the livelihood of the household within forest ecosystems. When these ecosystems are disrupted, youth and children are affected.

III. Youth involvement in implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action

31. Over the past two decades there has been greater recognition of youth as viable and necessary partners for social change, environmental protection and preservation, issues now collectively included in the concept of sustainable development. It has only been over the past decade that there has been an unprecedented growth in the number of new youth and children institutions and non-governmental organizations, operating particularly at the local level. However, within the "web" of the global youth movement, there are few youth groups specifically focused on action, education and awareness in the area of forests.

32. Forest issues cover a broad spectrum of sectors, including trade and globalization, pollution, governance, education, employment and poverty. It is in these contexts that youth input towards IPF/IFF proposals for action should be gauged.

33. The IPF/IFF proposals for actions' closest relationship with youth and children was the call on the NGO community to be responsible partners in research, awareness creation and information transfer to youth and children. But youth and children have a greater responsibility than awareness creation and information gathering alone, namely, the responsibility of ensuring that their future environment is healthy and productive. They will be the future actors in protecting forest biodiversity, safeguarding forest products like fuel, wood, medicines, foods, a habitat for other creatures and oxygen to sustain the human population for future generations.

34. There is a range of youth-led organizations and initiatives that focus on forest issues within the context of the environment. Some examples of such initiatives include: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Global Youth Forum, which is an annual event that provides youth with a platform for discussion, empowerment and action-building around environmental issues, including forests and forest-related matters. The UNEP Global Youth Retreat, which coincides in time with the UNEP Governing Council session, provides youth and children with the opportunity to contribute to the Governing Council session. These events are organized by the Youth/Sport and Environment Unit within UNEP. Other UNEP initiatives include the UNEP Youth Advisory Council, which is active in all fields of youth and environment, including forest issues. This structure is youth-led and includes representative young people active in environmental issues from all regions.

UNEP has also arranged the convening of the Children's Conference on the Environment in Canada in 2002. The importance of these meetings is that they provide youth with forums and platforms for skills exchange, transfer of information and the mobilization of youth NGOs. The outcomes have been positive and have also promoted the involvement of many young people in environmental and forest-related actions. These platforms and conferences have drawn youth and children's attention towards caring for forests and enhancing their interest in forest issues.

35. Regional cooperation among youth and children on forestry normally takes place within the broader context of the environment. In the build-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, regional conferences on sustainable development were held in cooperation with United Nations agencies, in particular the United Nations Environment Programme. These conferences dealt with a wide range of environment issues, including forests and related forest issues.

36. Regional youth platforms, such as the European Youth Forum and the African Youth Network, are actively involved in promoting environmental issues relating to forests through the establishment of sustainable development officers. These officers are responsible for youth policy and action on environmental and development issues. Along with these regional youth arrangements there are regional offices of international youth NGOs that promote the concerns of the regional scenarios, for example, the South American regional office for Oxfam and the International Youth Parliament. It is hoped that the United Nations regional economic and social commissions will enhance their profile with regard to youth involvement in forest issues.

37. A few Governments have made provisions for or have included forest issues and forest education in their national secondary school curricula, for example Nigeria. The inclusion of forest issues in national curricula at any level, whether primary, secondary or tertiary, is a positive step that serves to promote children and youth awareness of forest issues. Forests become relevant to young people within the context of an educational environment and Member States are encouraged to adopt such a policy as a strategy for targeting and engaging their youth population in forest issues. Education is the cornerstone of a nation's intellectual capacity.

38. At the national level, national youth councils exist in the majority of the Member States of the United Nations. These national youth structures serve to engage youth in issues pertaining to the environment and development and provide an opportunity for organizing awareness and creating programmes on forests.

IV. Economic aspects of forests

39. Forestry-relevant elements, such as timber, non-timber forest products, and tourism, are goods traded on global markets. The framework for forest management, such as environmental law, forest policy and trade in forest products, require foresters to be educated to deal with such aspects. To develop sound forest and land-use management it is important to understand the dynamics of ecosystems. Although there are significant differences between the individual systems, cooperation in investigation can increase the gain of knowledge in the understanding of the ecosystems. The International Forestry Students Association has been developing educational actions and programmes to ensure that young people who pursue careers

in forestry are equipped to deal with the economic activities of trade and the overarching results of globalization on forestry.

40. Internationally, youth and children are organizing themselves through the use of the Internet to ensure that their voice is heard at international economic conferences, forums and processes such as the World Bank, World Economic Forum and United Nations Conference on Financing for Development. Examples of this type of organizing include an initiative by the youth-run organization, Taking ITGlobal, which organized in conjunction with the World Economic Forum an Internet-based discussion platform for youth and children.

41. The Oxfam International Youth Parliament has produced a booklet that highlights the threats and opportunities presented by globalization. This booklet is one mechanism through which young people are presented with information related to economic processes that affect forests.

42. International youth NGOs increasingly include the environment as one of their key objectives; youth NGOs are particularly active in economic and environmental justice issues closely related to forests. Youth discussion platforms, mainly in the form of informal or formal Internet lists, have proved to be valuable contributors to information exchange between youth on forest issues. Youth and children have benefited from information from conferences and summits that have highlighted issues related to forests within the context of sustainable development and the environment. Forest-related issues have served as the focus for the activities of only a few youth and children NGOs; some examples of forest-related issues include the effect of globalization on the environment, youth employment to alleviate poverty and lessen the extent to which young people rely on unsustainable use of forests for their daily subsistence, and human rights relating to the protection of the cultural integrity of forest-dwelling people, such as the indigenous people of Brazil.

V. Forest health and productivity

43. At the global level, the International Forestry Students Association (IFSA) groups young people from all regions active in forestry. The Association is a student-run organization that focuses primarily on academic aspects and approaches to forestry, including the organization of awareness campaigns for students about the value of forests and forest products.

44. Local-level youth action on forests continues to be an effective tool for engaging youth and children in forest issues. A number of initiatives to enhance youth organizations at the local level have taken place in some regions. It can be argued that youth mobilization at the local level benefits the environment and forests within the geographical boundaries of that particular town or municipality, thereby contributing towards the improvement of forest health and productivity.

45. Among the global and regional platforms mentioned in paragraph 15, discussions have ensued on the effects of air pollution on forests and the effects of groundwater and soil pollution on forests and forest ecosystems. These discussions continue to provide young people with valuable insights into such threats.

VI. Maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs

46. Forestry education deals with the management of natural resources. Natural resources are the most important capital of developing countries. Higher education is therefore an important factor in the development of countries, particularly forest education.

47. The development of tertiary education programmes on forests and forest management is encouraging. Students are learning the skills required to ensure that forests are preserved to provide for future generations in a sustainable manner. Governments are encouraged further to enhance tertiary education areas on forests by offering students a wide range of skills aimed at achieving sustainable forest management. Without students trained and educated in sustainable forest management, there may be in the future a deficit of intellectual capacity with regard to sustainable forest management.

48. Local and national tourism authorities have recognized the valuable contribution that ecotourism can bring to forests. One such example is the youth and children training camp concept, which seeks to create awareness about forests and educate young people about sustainable practices. Sustainable use of forests for ecotourism is a viable option for increasing revenue to the local community, as well as for protecting forests through awareness creation and maintenance of the forest area.

VII. Recommendations

49. The youth and children major group of the United Nations Forum on Forests:

(a) Recognizes that in this age of information technology greater opportunities for information exchange exist than ever before. Youth and children now have access to all of the latest information on forests and related forest issues via the Internet. These opportunities will be considered in length at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva later in 2003;

(b) Acknowledges that the growing use of Internet and e-mail communication has positive implications for young people the world over. This affords them the opportunity to discuss and organize themselves around issues with the minimal use of resources. This is one way in which globalization can be used to benefit local communities;

(c) Further acknowledges that great opportunities are provided through Government and civil society partnerships, especially in the consideration of youth and children and forests. Member States are encouraged to engage youth and children organizations through partnerships and cooperative agreements, for example, creating awareness campaigns with local organizations or developing a national strategy for youth training in forest conservation. In addition, Member States are encouraged to build the capacity of local and national youth NGOs in order to promote their involvement in vital forest actions, especially in forest sectors, such as the sustainable use of forest products;

(d) Recognizes that youth and children have enthusiasm and energy that can be channelled into constructive programmes by local municipalities, for example, providing for the establishment of youth forestry clubs at the local level and promoting forestry issues within national educational curricula at the primary and secondary levels;

(e) Acknowledges the potential role for national and regional youth platforms to monitor the implementation of United Nations Forum on Forests outcomes and the IPF/IFF proposals for action. Subcommittees on national youth platforms should be created in regional bodies to monitor the implementation of global agendas, such as Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda. Communication between these subcommittees and regional bodies should also be encouraged;

(f) Recognizes that students with tertiary education are the future intellectual capital of their country and that there exists a high correlation between the quantity and quality of citizens with higher education and the development environment of their country. It is important that higher education be promoted as a means for educating and involving youth in the future protection and sustainable management of forests;

(g) Calls upon the Governments present at the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests to consider the inclusion of youth delegates within the national delegations at the fourth session of the UNFF;

(h) Calls upon the Governments present at the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests to recognize and identify youth as valuable and relevant partners for the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and subsequent United Nations Forum on Forests outcome documents;

(i) Encourages youth and children NGOs to work towards the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action;

(j) Requests donor institutions, Governments and the United Nations to increase technical and financial support for youth and children activities concerning forests;

(k) Encourages Governments present at the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests to promote the forging of Government and civil society partnerships on forests, with youth NGOs at the local, national and regional levels;

(l) Calls on multinational corporations to recognize the impact of their activities on forests and forest-dwelling communities, especially indigenous communities;

(m) Applauds the United Nations Forum on Forests for currently involving stakeholders through the multi-stakeholder dialogue and encourages the Forum to enhance and strengthen the profile of the multi-stakeholder dialogue segment of future Forum sessions;

(n) Calls on Governments to focus on creating employment opportunities for young people, as well as on creating, in a sustainable manner, social services and basic infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals and universities. This will place local communities in a better position to use forests in a sustainable manner;

(o) Calls upon Governments to promote youth involvement in the United Nations and the work of its agencies, in order to ensure that youth and children are represented at all levels of decision-making, thus including valuable input on issues affecting young people. In particular, the inclusion of young people in official delegations to the United Nations Forum on Forests and similar appropriate United Nations meetings will provide greater scope for youth in the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action;

(p) Calls on multinational corporations that are based in developed countries but have operations in developing countries to ensure that they implement meaningful social responsibility programmes that seek to promote the sustainable development of the communities that host them. Meaningful investment into local communities will improve economic and social conditions and lessen the unsustainable dependency on forests and forest biodiversity and forest products. Multinational corporations can create opportunities for young people through such investment; the corporations will be able to improve production, as well as improve opportunities for locals;

(q) Calls upon Governments, international financial institutions and civil society to enhance the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Forestry Students Association and other institutions with a view to providing higher education for young people on forests. Education should also be recognized as a means for averting the effects of armed conflict on forest, the forest industry and forest-dwelling communities;

(r) Calls upon international institutions to provide a link between educated forestry students and relevant programmes, with the aim of providing forestry students with valuable and relevant experience in sustainable forest management;

(s) Requests Governments to support the formation of a World Youth Action on Forests Network, which will serve to organize youth action on forest issues.

VIII. Conclusion

50. Youth and children generally lack a thorough knowledge of the complex issues relating to forests. This lack of knowledge does not, however, indicate a lack of understanding that the environment and particularly our forests will soon be their responsibility.

51. The United Nations Forum on Forests provides a platform where States can discuss the important issues relating to forests. The Forum should be recognized as a platform to enhance civil society participation in global decision-making processes on forests, focusing especially on youth and children participation. Youth and children will be required to protect the forests for future generations and the international community must therefore work to create awareness among youth, educate youth about forests and design, implement and evaluate programmes and projects led by youth on forests.